

## **Questions and Answers Regarding the Petition to List the Wolverine as a Threatened or Endangered Species**

*The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has concluded that a petition to list the wolverine as a threatened or endangered species with critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act does not provide substantial information that a listing may be warranted at this time. The following questions and answers provide information regarding this finding.*

### **What is the Service's finding regarding the petition to list the wolverine as a threatened or endangered species?**

After careful review of the petition and its supporting documentation, as well as other available information, the Service has concluded that current available data is insufficient to determine wolverine distribution and habitat requirements. It also is impossible to know if the continued existence of the wolverine could be threatened.

Therefore, the Service has concluded that the petition does not provide substantial biological information to indicate that a listing may be warranted at this time.

### **What information did the Service use to make this finding?**

At present, very little is known about the wolverine; however, the USDA Forest Service is leading a cooperative effort with other Federal agencies, States, and Tribes to conduct research and studies which will improve understanding of the species and its conservation needs.

### **What is a 90-day finding?**

Under the Endangered Species Act, any citizen or organization can petition the Service to list a species. The 90-day finding is the first step in processing a petition.

The Service was petitioned by the Biodiversity Legal Foundation, Predator Conservation Alliance, Defenders of Wildlife, Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, Friends of the Clearwater, and Superior Wilderness Network to list the wolverine in the contiguous United States as a threatened or endangered species, and to designate critical habitat for the species.

A similar petition to list the wolverine was filed by the Biodiversity Legal Foundation in 1994. At that time, the Service published a 90-day finding that the petition did not contain substantial information to warrant a status review of the species. Since then, little new information has been published regarding wolverine ecology.

### **Does the 90-day finding constitute a final decision to list the wolverine?**

No, the 90-day finding is not a decision to list the wolverine. It determines that the information

in the petition is either “substantial” or “not substantial” to support the petitioned action. A non-substantial finding ends the petition process. A “substantial” finding means that the requested action may be warranted. If the 90-day petition finding is substantial, the Service begins a formal status review of the species, which culminates in a 12-month finding on the petition.

### **Why do the petitioners think the wolverine should be added to the list of threatened and endangered species?**

The petitioners contend that low numbers of wolverine indicate that they are imperiled. However, low numbers of wolverine are a natural condition, because wolverines maintain extremely large home ranges and have low reproductive rates. Consequently, there is not enough information to determine whether wolverine numbers are declining.

The petition also asserts that wolverines have been impacted by the loss of roadless areas and the resulting increase in logging practices, human disturbance of denning habitat, landscape fragmentation due to transportation corridors and associated developments, and trapping. However, the information provided in the petition, as well as all other available information, is insufficient to determine whether destruction or modification of wolverine habitat is occurring. The Service also found insufficient evidence to indicate that wolverine trapping in Montana poses a threat to the continued existence of the wolverine population in the Lower 48 States.

The Service anticipates that ongoing wolverine studies--including a scientific assessment of wolverines in the contiguous United States, led by the Forest Service and available in 2004--will greatly improve our understanding of this species.

### **What is a wolverine?**

The wolverine is the largest land species of the “mustelid” or weasel family, with adults weighing 17 to 40 pounds. In appearance, it has more characteristics of a small bear than a weasel. It feeds primarily by scavenging on carrion.

### **What is the range of the wolverine?**

In North America, wolverines occur in a variety of habitats--primarily boreal forests, tundra, and western mountains throughout Alaska and Canada, with the southern portion of the range extending into the contiguous United States. The current range of the wolverine in the contiguous United States is believed to include Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and possibly California. Because the range and habitat requirements of the wolverine in the contiguous United States are not well understood, it is impossible to accurately delineate the historic or current range using available information. The range in the Great Lakes region and northeastern United States is difficult to determine because historic records are sketchy. Until the Service has a better understanding of the habitat requirements of the wolverine, it cannot ascertain whether habitats in many States were once capable of supporting wolverine.

